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Chiang Mai, Thailand

January 2011 by Rev. Kathy Clark

This past January, a group of Southeast Conference TAP graduates and participants travelled with a group of seminarians from Lancaster Theological Seminary to Chiang Mae, Mae Sot, and Bangkok, Thailand for a Global Theological Education Immersion trip. The theme of the trip was:



"Equipping Leaders To Serve In A Religiously Pluralistic World."

Over the course of three weeks, the group was hosted by the Institute of Religion, Culture, and Peace of Payap University, with whom they studied inter- and intra-faith dialogue, conflict transformation, and peace-building in the Thai context.

Listen in on the reflections of our world travellers by reading their journal entries for the trip and join them vicariously in this transforming experience. >[Follow link to read journal entries.](#)

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Headlines from the United Church of Christ

[New report examines impact of recession on congregational vitality](#)

The 2008 recession extended a decade-long erosion of the financial health of American congregations, with just 14 percent of the 11,077 randomly sampled congregations saying in 2010 that their financial health is excellent.





“Changes and Enduring Realities”

TAP Global Theological Immersion Trip to Thailand 2011

by Rev. Sarah Kim

Despite their unique approaches to understanding reality, Western and Eastern philosophers both agreed that life is all about the perpetual change. Change is a fact of life and there is no way to get around it—or is there? What I encountered in my second trip to Thailand on this global theological endeavor was both *change* and *enduring realities* of life.

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First, what was changed or what was different from the last trip in 2008 was the group with which I traveled. This time we had seven seminary students and a faculty member of Lancaster Theological Seminary along with our own seven participants from the Southeast Conference. The two groups merged beautifully, in light of their conscious efforts to collaborate, adapt, and to exercise love and patience. Second, the Institute of Religion Culture and Peace's (IRCP) program had changed—the length was three weeks long with the inclusion of a special trip to Mae Sot, a small city in the northwestern border of Thailand that holds large-size Burmese Refugee Camps. To say the least, it was challenging for me to witness the living conditions of the refugees as they were without much prospects for change or hope. Third, my view of Thailand and its people had changed, only because I was able to understand better, deeper, and closer the second time around. These changes certainly made the trip experience much more meaningful and richer.

What, then, are the enduring realities? These lie closer to the inner realms of the heart and the mind. In my view, they are our desires to “communicate” and “build relationships” through inter- and intra-faith dialogues. They are our desires to “resolve conflict” and “build peace” through mutual understanding and respect. They are our desires to love, laugh, and live in peace and in health. During the trip, one participant asked me, “So, what do we do with this [experience] when we go back?” I did not answer her right there and then, but my hope is that we all remember the enduring realities and commit to actualizing them wherever we are, whatever we are doing.

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